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ABSTRACT

Traditional British attitudes toward foreigners, which are now being challenged by current economic realities, and the increasing internationalization of British business, which magnifies the need for employees to communicate effectively with people from other countries and cultures, are discussed. A brief overview is provided that covers recent trends in degree course offerings, compulsory and optional foreign language study, and study availability. Comparative data are reported from the 1989 publication, "Degree Course Guides," regarding the balance and content of courses offered primarily by universities and polytechnics. The preponderance of courses in business, management, and accountancy is noted, as is the increasing number of students who are combining those fields with foreign language study, particularly French, German, Spanish, Russian, and Italian. Further discussion focuses on the varying levels of interaction between foreign language and business study, ranging from low-level to high-level integration. Examples of such programs in Great Britain are cited. It is concluded that there are now widespread opportunities for British first-degree seekers in business, management, and accountancy to include foreign language study in their coursework, especially if they are interested in developing business foreign language competencies in major Western European languages. Contains 14 references. (LB)

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Unions Between Foreign Language and Business: British Patterns

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Unions Between Foreign Language and Business: British Patterns

Historically the British people have despised foreigners who achieve success only by training so diligently for it. The British people still like to believe that any untrained Briton can muddle through brilliantly (Lund, 1987). They revere the amateur, "the gentleman with flair who disdains training or practice and succeeds without taking things too seriously" (Linstead, Harper, & Denton, 1988, p. 8). Many Britons in prominent positions still regard education and training for managers as largely unnecessary or at best undesirable (Lund, 1987).

However, this longstanding culturally transmitted mind set is being challenged by the grim realities of economic life. To survive—let alone thrive—in the increasingly competitive internationalized business world, British businesspersons are recognizing that they must communicate with their trading partners in their languages—not just in English. Now barely one fourth of total British exports go to the English-speaking world, primarily the Commonwealth countries and the United States of America. British exports to Europe now account for more than half of total exports (Segal, 1987), and 82 percent of the population within the soon-to-be single market of the European Community does not speak English as its native

language ("British Must Get," 1990, Weekend June 1–3). British exports to the Middle East and the Far East are growing, too (Segal, 1987).

While the increasing internationalization of British business magnifies the need for employees to communicate effectively with people from other countries and cultures (Management Challenges, 1989), research in five Western European countries found that foreign competitors perceive British businesspersons to be poorly prepared not only to establish appropriate social relationships with potential trading partners but also to discuss technical and commercial matters with them (McCall, 1985).

The apparent inability of many British businesspersons to communicate effectively with potential trading partners is costing the companies they represent considerable business, business that the companies cannot afford to lose. In a survey conducted by researchers from Newcastle Polytechnic, respondents from 54 percent of the sampled British businesses acknowledged that the companies they represent had lost trading opportunities with foreigners because the companies did not have employees who could transact business in the appropriate languages (Segal, 1987). Clearly, a direct link exists between export performance and foreign language proficiency (The Single Market, 1989). Ironically,

the British business community, which has scorned long–term employee development, now is realizing that it needs linguistically skilled employees, who are not produced overnight (Linstead, Harper, & Denton, 1988).

Fortunately for the sake of the British business community, the benefits of coupling foreign language study and business study were recognized as early as the 1960s, initially at the colleges of advanced technology that had recently become universities, then at the polytechnics, and finally at the universities, especially the red brick or civic ones (Crane, 1987). As a result of these serendipitous unions between foreign language and business at various educational institutions, the current urgent need for employees who are both linguistically and managerially competent can be partially met by the graduates of British first–degree (baccalaureate) courses in business, management, and accountancy who have studied both foreign language and business subjects. But how available are such courses in Britian? What is the state of the art for these unions between foreign language and business in Britian?

Overview of Nationwide Perspective

Degree Course Guides, 1989/90 (Knight, 1989) includes one of the most comprehensive published collections of comparable information about British first–degree courses in

business, management, and accountancy, which are usually to the honours standard. Information about these three– and four–year bachelor's degree courses in which half or more of the teaching time is devoted to business–related subjects is available for almost all British universities, polytechnics, and other educational institutions in the tertiary (higher and further education) sector. Since the information is updated frequently, it provides the best available nationwide perspective on the union between foreign language and business.

Compulsory Foreign Language Study

Table 2 in the section on business, management, and accountancy courses, which is found on pages 20 through 36, provides comparative data about the balance and content of the offered courses. The data in the languages column refer to foreign languages since the British tertiary educational system assumes mastery of the English language prior to admittance into first–degree courses. Analysis of the data in that column reveals that 20 of the 174 listed British first–degree courses in business, management, and accountancy or 11 percent have compulsory foreign language requirements. These courses are offered primarily by universities and polytechnics, with other types of tertiary educational institutions playing very minor roles. The compulsory

percentages of total course teaching time devoted to foreign language study vary from 4 percent to 44 percent, with universities tending to devote more course teaching time to foreign language study than the other types of educational institutions. Course titles such as international business, business studies, European business studies, and European management science(s) tend to be associated with compulsory foreign language study.

Optional Foreign Language Study

Analysis of the data in the same table also reveals that 68 of the 174 listed British first–degree courses in business, management, and accountancy or 39 percent have options that allow foreign language study. These courses are about twice as likely to be offered by universities as by polytechnics, with other types of tertiary educational institutions playing minor roles. The maximum percentages of total course teaching time devoted to optional foreign language study vary from 2 percent to 44 percent, with universities tending to devote more course teaching time to optional foreign language study than the other types of educational institutions. Course titles such as business studies, accounting, accounting with finance, management science(s), and commerce tend to be associated with optional foreign language study.

Overall Foreign Language

Study Availability

Further, the same data reveal that 88 of the 174 listed British first–degree courses or 51 percent incorporate foreign language study on a compulsory or optional basis as part of business, management, or accountancy courses. The data in the languages column of Table 2 suggest that there are widespread opportunities for those enrolled in British business, management, and accountancy first–degree courses to develop needed foreign language skills if they are willing to take advantage of them. Published information about the number of British first–degree seekers in business, management, and accountancy who are studying foreign languages is not available. Informal and unofficial sources of information, which tend to reflect the perspective at one or a small number of tertiary educational institutions, suggest that while the number of first–degree seekers who combine foreign language study with business, management, and accountancy study is growing, overall that number is a small percentage of the total number of first–degree seekers in business, management, and accountancy courses.

Specific Foreign

Language Availability

Likewise, published information about the foreign languages studied by these British first–degree seekers in business, management, and accountancy is not available. Nevertheless, some relevant information can be gleaned from the listing of combined subjects for business, management, and accounting first–degree courses on pages 16 and 17 of Degree Course Guides, 1989/90 (Knight, 1989). That listing suggests that French is the foreign language most often available for study followed by German and Spanish in second and third places respectively. Russian and Italian are in distant fourth and fifth places respectively. Thus, it appears that major Western European languages are likely to be the ones studied by those who combine foreign language and business study in the United Kingdom.

State of the Art Perspective

Perhaps the best way to assess the state of the art of British first–degree courses that join foreign language study with business study is to judge them in terms of the degree to which the two disciplines are integrated. Specific courses may be judged against a five–point integration continuum that runs between low and high levels of integration and assigned

positions that approximate their relative positions vis-à-vis other unions between foreign language and business study.

Low–Level Integration

At the lowest level of union between foreign language and business study, foreign language study is an option within a British first–degree course in business, management, or accountancy. Students may choose to study a foreign language in conjunction with their business, management, or accountancy study, but they are not required to do so. Since the foreign language and business curricula are separate and since the foreign language instruction is not business oriented, the burden for integrating the two disciplines falls entirely upon the students. In some cases those students who choose to incorporate foreign language into their business–related studies may spend some time abroad in a country where the studied foreign language is an official language.

The business studies course at Bristol Polytechnic is an example of a course with a low level of integration between foreign language and business study. The course is taught by the Bristol Business School faculty and by the Department of Modern Languages faculty only if students select a foreign language option ("BA (Hons)," 1990).

During the first year all business studies students study through the Bristol Business School financial analysis;

economics; law; quantitative methods; work, business, and organisations; and business skills. In addition, those who choose a foreign language option through the Department of Modern Languages study French, German, or Spanish, while those who do not choose a foreign language option study through the Bristol Business School the political environment of business or the social environment of business ("BA (Hons)," 1990).

During the second year all students study through the Bristol Business School finance and accounting, marketing, operations management, employee relations, and business problems. In addition, all students select two from the following options: French, German, or Spanish from the Department of Modern Languages and/or business contracts, small business, public policy making, advanced economics, computer–based information systems, tourist analysis, or tourism resource operations from the Bristol Business School ("BA (Hons)," 1990).

During the third year all students obtain relevant work experience, typically somewhere in the United Kingdom unless they have completed one of the foreign–language options, in which case they may work abroad in a country where the studied foreign language is an official language ("BA (Hons)," 1990).

During the fourth year all students study through the Bristol Business School strategic management, information systems, and organisational analysis and behaviour. In addition, all students select three of the following options through the Bristol Business School: international marketing; marketing research; buyer behaviour; financial statement analysis and planning; business finance; financial planning and control; industrial relations; human resource management; comparative employment patterns; systems and operations research; purchasing and project management; design and retail management; managing operations for quality and productivity; tourism policy; or leisure, recreation, and tourism economics.

Students who successfully complete the course earn bachelor of arts honours degrees in business studies ("BA (Hons)," 1990.

Moderately Low-Level Integration

At a moderately low level of union between foreign language and business study, the two disciplines are combined within a British first-degree course in business, management, or accountancy. Although foreign language study is required, it is taught outside of the business school and is not primarily business oriented. Since the foreign language and business-related curricula are entirely separate,

the burden for integrating the two disciplines falls primarily upon the students, who may spend some amount of time abroad in a country where the studied foreign language is an official language.

The accounting and finance with French, German, or Italian course at the University of Lancaster is an example of a course with a moderately low level of integration between foreign language and business study. This course is taught by the faculty of The Management School and the Department of Modern Languages (Lancaster University, 1990).

During the first year students study introductory accounting and finance and another subject, typically economics, through The Management School and French, German, or Italian studies through the Department of Foreign Languages (Lancaster University, 1990).

During the second year students study principles of accounting and finance and quantitative methods in accounting and finance through The Management School and French, German, or Italian language and another course in French, German, or Italian studies through the Department of Foreign Languages (Lancaster University, 1990).

During the third year students study at comparable foreign educational institutions and/or work in a French–,

German–, or Italian–speaking country (Lancaster University, 1990).

During the fourth year students study two one–term courses in international markets and/or international taxation and comparative accounting and introduction to English law or two further one–term courses in accounting and finance through The Management School or French, German, or Italian language and one further course in French, German, or Italian studies through the Department of Foreign Languages (Lancaster University, 1990).

Students who successfully complete the course earn bachelor of arts honours degrees in accounting and finance and either French, German, or Italian (Lancaster University, 1990).

Moderate–Level Integration

At a moderate level of union between foreign language and business study, the two disciplines are combined within a British first–degree course in business, management, or accountancy that includes foreign language instruction with a strong business orientation. However, the foreign language and business–related curricula remain essentially separate. While some foreign language instruction relates to business situations, no business content is taught in the foreign language. The burden for integrating the two disciplines falls

primarily upon the foreign language faculty and the students. Often overseas experiences are used to facilitate the amalgamation of the foreign language and business study.

The management studies and French or Spanish course at the University of Bradford is an example of a course with a moderate level of integration between foreign language and business study. This course is taught by the Management Centre and the Department of Modern Languages (University of Bradford, 1990).

During the first year students study European economics, accounting and finance, business statistics and mathematics, computing and data processing, occupational psychology, and business organisations through the Management Centre and business–oriented French or Spanish through the Department of Modern Languages (University of Bradford, 1990).

During the second year students study European economic integration, marketing, and production and operations management plus two of the following through the Management Centre: financial management I, operational research I, psychology at work, or managing organisations. In addition, the students study the second year of a business–oriented foreign language through the Department of Modern Languages (University of Bradford, 1990).

During the third year students study at comparable foreign educational institutions and/or work in a French– or Spanish–speaking country and submit to their supervisors projects and assignments in the relevant foreign language (University of Bradford, 1990).

During the fourth year students study international business and three of the following through the Management Centre: accounting II, accounting III, financial management II, operational research II, information technology, business policy, personnel psychology, managerial psychology, personnel management, marketing research and sales promotion, strategic marketing, production and operations management, industrial relations, or social philosophy. In addition, the students study the third year of business–oriented foreign language through the Department of Modern Languages (University of Bradford, 1990).

Students who successfully complete the course earn bachelor of arts honours degrees in management studies and French or Spanish (University of Bradford, 1990).

Moderately High–Level Integration

At a moderately high level of union between foreign language and business study, the two disciplines are combined within a British first–degree course in business, management, or accountancy such that some of the business–

related courses are taught in a foreign language. This necessitates combining the foreign language and business–related curricula and sharing the responsibility for integrating the two disciplines, but not always on an equal basis. Typically students spend a block of time abroad, usually one year, where the studied foreign language is an official language. While enrolled in comparable foreign educational institutions, the students receive business–related instruction via the foreign languages they have studied. In some situations the students may also work abroad in companies operating in countries that use the studied foreign languages as their official languages.

The international business and modern languages (French or German) course at Aston University is an example of a course with a moderately high level of integration between foreign language and business study. This course is jointly taught by the Aston Business School and the Department of Modern Languages ("International Business," 1990).

During the first year students develop a foundation in business and in their chosen foreign language with emphasis on the vocabulary relevant to the business environment. The attention of students is also focused on a comparative analysis of innovation and structural change in the United Kingdom

and in France or Germany. Such component courses as those that address comparative accounting and finance, economic principles and institutions, business organisation and human resources, and quantitative methods are taught in English. Such component courses as those that address information technology, language and communication, and international business environment are taught in English and French or German. Such component courses as those that address written and spoken languages and the emergence of post-war France or Germany are taught in French or German ("International Business," 1990).

During the second year students develop an understanding of the functional areas of business and their integration. The linguistic communication proficiency of the students is further enhanced through in-depth textual analysis closely linked to the study of the social, economic, and political organisation of France or Germany. The students also focus attention on the international business environment and the legal system. Such component courses as those that address accounting for business decisions, marketing, and operations management are taught in English. Such component courses as those that address international business environment and comparative socio-political institutions and management, English and French or German

legal systems, and European Community law for the manager are taught in English and in French or German. Such component courses as those that address the written and spoken language and contemporary French or German society are taught in French or German ("International Business," 1990).

During the third year students study abroad at comparable French– or German–speaking educational institutions where all instruction is delivered in the local language. Whenever possible, students spend part of the third year working abroad in businesses in countries where the studied foreign languages are the official languages ("International Business," 1990).

During the fourth year students develop skills in analyzing international aspects of management as well as an understanding of the legal and institutional framework within which organisations are managed. Such courses as those that address policy analysis and decision making, international finance, international economics, and international marketing are taught in English. Such courses as those that address advanced written or spoken language skills and contemporary issues in France or Germany are taught in French or German ("International Business," 1990).

Students who successfully complete the course earn bachelor of science joint honours degrees in international business and modern languages ("International Business," 1990).

High–Level Integration

At a high level of union between foreign language and business, the two disciplines are combined in such a manner that they yield degrees or diplomas that are recognized in two countries, the United Kingdom and a country where the studied foreign language is an official language. The foreign language and business–related curricula are fully merged, and responsibility for integrating the two disciplines is shared relatively equally by all involved faculty. The students are required to spend a block of time abroad, usually two years, in countries where the studied foreign languages are official languages engaged in study at comparable foreign educational institutions and in work in businesses.

The European business administration course at Middlesex Polytechnic is an example of a course with a high level of integration between foreign language and business study. This course is jointly taught by the Middlesex Business School in London, England; the Ecole Supérieure de Commerces in Reims, France; the Fachhockschule für Technik und Wirtschaft in Reutlingen, Germany; and the Universidad

Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, Spain. Half of the students enrolling in each institution spend the first two years in their link country; the other half reverse the order ("Courses for Careers," 1990).

This course presents specialised business and administrative knowledge within a broad and integrated European context. European studies is taught throughout the course, and students choose areas of specialisation only after having had considerable education and work experience. Students present extended research projects on practical problems related to European business administration during the final stages of the course. Since not all students have equivalent language and mathematics backgrounds, remedial instruction is provided as necessary during the first year of the course. British students, regardless of whether they start the course at home or abroad, receive language instruction in French, German, or Spanish throughout the first two years of the course. All teaching and examining is done in the language of the country in which students are studying ("Courses for Careers," 1990).

During the first year students study disciplines that are applied to business administration, including economics, quantitative methods, computing, behavioural science, law,

marketing, accounting fundamentals, manpower studies, and production management ("Courses for Careers," 1990).

During the first six–month period of the second year, students work in businesses in the country where they have started the course. Then during the second six–month period, the students engage in in–depth study of the major functional areas of the firm, including marketing, finance, manpower studies, production management, accountancy, computing, and law ("Courses for Careers," 1990).

Students begin their third year in their second countries. For the first six–month period, they continue their studies in marketing, finance, manpower studies, production management, accountancy, computing, and law in the language of their second countries. Then during the second six–month period, the students work in businesses in their second countries, where they use the languages of their second countries ("Courses for Careers," 1990).

During the fourth year students prepare for their final examinations. In addition, they may choose two specialised optional subjects from marketing, accountancy, manpower studies, European commercial law, European Community law, international finance, production management, and informatics. Students are also required to present their

research studies on an individual basis ("Courses for Careers," 1990).

Students who successfully complete the course earn qualifications in two countries: in the United Kingdom bachelor of arts honours degrees in European business administration and in France the Diplôme d' Etudes Supérieures Européenes de Management, in Germany the Diplom–Betriebswirt (FH), and in Spain the Graduado Superior en Ciencias Empresariales ("Courses for Careers," 1990).

In summary, there are now widespread opportunities for British first–degree seekers in business, management, and accountancy to include foreign language study in their coursework, especially if they are interested in developing business foreign language competencies in major Western European languages. British unions between foreign language and business study vary considerably in terms of the degree of integration between the two primary disciplines; they run the gamut from low to high levels of integration as illustrated by the five described courses that combine foreign language and business study to varying degrees.

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